

As is well known, if a cave is entered and the bats disturbed, most of them will fly out, but soon return. It was the returning bats that reacted to their captured companions in this manner.

DEPT. OF ZOOLOGY,
MAHARAJA'S COLLEGE, JAIPUR,
JASWANT COLLEGE, JODHPUR,
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4. RATS IN HUMAN DIETARY

We were camping in the jungles of West Khandesh Division and, while returning one cold evening in January around sunset in a bullock cart from the banks of the river Tapti after an unsuccessful Mugger hunt, my companion, a forest officer, and I espied a cheerful fire crackling in a nullah about 50 yards from the fire-line along which we were travelling. Hoping to catch some poachers redhanded with their illicit gains, my companion and I tip-toed to the spot to find an old man and a couple of young lads sitting comfortably by the fire and calmly chewing the cud of thought. Near the fire lay one large basket covered over with fresh green leaves.

They evinced no great surprise when thus we broke in on their tranquillity. However, when asked to open up the basket, they demurred. Our suspicions strengthening, we repeated that they should uncover the basket promptly, whereupon the old man did so and what a loathsome sight greeted our unbelieving eyes! The basket contained nothing but dead rats of varying sizes; big rats, small rats, middling rats, even small little squeakers, all together numbering about 50 and all recently singed over a fire without even the trouble of having their intestines removed. There they lay, as if living in death, with bloated stomachs and glazed eyes, their greyish white skin shining smooth under the fire light as all the hair had been scraped carefully away. It was enough to rob us completely of our keen appetite for dinner.

This party, who belonged to the Kathodi Bhil tribe, averred that rats were a frequent item of diet on their otherwise meagre menu. However, when asked to eat one in our presence, they declined. Then, they went on to explain to us the 'modus operandi' of rat-catching. When they come across what looks like a promising rat-hole, they dig deep and wide around it, widening its mouth. Then a piece of rag soaked in a little kerosene is lighted up and put therein, and a basket lined with green leaves is used as a cover on top. This causes the smoke to go underground in the winding tunnels and the rats, on getting the smoke or smelling something afire, make for the nearest exit. But men are already posted there and on the rats emerging finish them off with their sticks. If any agile rodent eludes the men with sticks, then it meets its fate at the hands or rather the canines of their pet mongrel, and we saw several such rats which bore on their bodies the marks of canine teeth. Sometimes, these men use the expedient of flooding out the rats, if a source of water like a nullah or river is handy.

However, with these men also there was a point of honour. When we suggested that they carry out their operations in adjoining fields where rats were reportedly doing a lot of damage, they shook their heads emphatically. Jungle rats only would be acceptable. Field rats were not their kettle of fish.

Thinking this incident over on the way home I felt that, after all, a meal of cooked rats is really not so revolting. The jungle rat is comparatively a clean feeder and belongs to the same group as the rabbit whose meat most of us will tuck away with much evident relish.

BANOO MANSION,
NANPURA, SURAT,
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F. D. GHEYARA

[The species referred to is apparently the Indian Mole-Rat (*Nesokia indica*), a prolific and destructive species with practically an all-India distribution. It forms a regular item of food for many local tribes in the countryside, who, in addition, dig up its burrows after the harvest for the grain it is in the habit of storing away. According to Jerdon a single burrow will sometimes yield as much as half a seer (1 lb.) of grain, containing even whole ears of jowari (*Sorghum vulgare*).—EDS.]

5. TUSKS OF INDIAN ELEPHANTS

Further to my note of 15 October 1946 (*JBNHS*, 46: 717/18), on the question of size of Indian elephants and their tusks, I send you details of two pairs of tusks which are still bigger than the ones I reported.

In 1953 the Ruler of Talcher killed a rogue tusker elephant in Dhenkanal, Orissa, which was 11' in height, each tusk weighing 1 md. 10 seers and measuring 8' 6" in length. A photograph of the Raja with the tusks was published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 15 February 1953.

In 1952 a very large pair of tusks was found in the Goalpara East Division, Assam, the elephant having died a natural death or having been shot by poachers. One tusk weighed 1 md. 9 seers. 13 chattaks and measured 9' 2" in length and 1' 5" in girth. The other tusk was found cut short, probably by the persons who had concealed both the tusks in the jungle with the obvious intention of stealing them. Though some cut pieces were recovered, it was not possible to ascertain the exact measurements and weight of the mutilated tusk. As the two tusks were obviously symmetrical it may be taken that the cut tusk was of approximately the same length, weight, and girth as the complete tusk. The cut tusk was re-constructed with a wooden piece shaped and coloured exactly like the ivory and the pair was exhibited at the IVth World Forestry Congress at Dehra Dun in December 1954.

While the Ruler of Talcher's pair is the second heaviest pair on record, there are 3 individual tusks on record each heavier than a single tusk of this pair. The uncut tusk of the Assam pair referred to here is the third longest on record. I give below the weights and